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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

April 3, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Alpha 66 raid of March 17-B, the press conference held by Cubans in Washington, and the San Jose Conference.

1. What we know about this raid comes mainly third hand, but it appears that two outfits called "Alpha 66" and "The Second Front of the Escambray" joined in a small boat raid on a harbor on the north coast of Cuba on the night of March 17-18. These raids have only a hazy sense of target, and the leaders generally shoot at whatever is the biggest object within reach. In this case it appears to have been the Russian merchant ship, L'gov.
2. On March 19 in Washington (at the Roger Smith Hotel) the two groups held a joint press conference announcing the attack and issuing a war communique. This announcement appears to have exaggerated the meaning of the raid in a number of ways: it was asserted that a landing and attack were made against a Russian encampment, and here information is wholly negative on any such episode; that the Russian merchant ship opened fire on the commandos and was damaged by return fire -- our information is that any damage done to the merchant ship was minimal; that there were about twelve Russian casualties and two casualties among the leaders -- while we do not know, and we do not see how Alpha-66 can know, what casualties, if any, were caused to the Russians.
3. The press conference was held in our capital city during the second day of a major international conference in San Jose. It was thus obviously designed as a political instrument, and it was an effort to serve some ulterior political purpose on the basis of a single, wholly unproductive and ill-planned adventure. This episode, in which there was so much more talk than action, and so much more publicity than performance, is an example of the kind of action which does not advance the interests of the U. S. or those

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of a free Cuba, and it is a good example of the sort of thing against which the statements and actions of this Government have been directed in recent days.

(The statement of March 30 is attached.)

(It is also a fact that a LIFE photographer was carried along on this raid, but so far this fact has not surfaced, and the State recommendation is that you not be the one to break it. I agree, because it would only stir LIFE to some form of hostile comment.)

McG. B.

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